

Chapter 3. Transportation Issues and Goals

The discussion of the metropolitan transportation system described the different elements and how they relate to one another. This chapter will discuss some of the current issues that must be balanced with one another in developing the long-range plan recommendations. The major issues identified by the PDCTC include:

- Infrastructure Maintenance
- Mobility and Congestion
- Safety
- Environmental Quality
- Land Use Impacts
- Economic Development
- Freight Movement
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Activities
- Enhancement Activities
- Demographic and Travel Trends
- Intermodal Opportunities

All of the issues and goals presented in this element relate to the Planning Factors outlined in TEA-21, including preservation of existing transportation system, support of economic vitality of the metropolitan area, protection and enhancement of the environment, and improved connectivity of the system for people and freight. The issue of funding will be covered in the next element (Financial Resources).

Infrastructure Maintenance

Invest in a State of Good Repair to assure a safe, reliable and cost effective transportation network.

The transportation network described in the previous chapter represents a major investment by both public and private interests. The network evolved slowly, and over the years some elements of the network infrastructure have suffered from deferred maintenance. Poor pavement quality can affect speed and capacity, bridges can be posted or closed, and transit equipment may become unreliable or dangerous to operate. The costs of deferred maintenance are borne by the community at large in the form of increased delay and decreased efficiency. Over the long-term the costs of repair or replacement of severely deteriorated infrastructure far outweigh the cost of routine and periodic maintenance.

Mobility and Congestion

Provide for safe, efficient and cost effective movement of people and goods within the area and to and from other regions. Address congestion through appropriate systems and demand management actions.

The term "mobility" means many different things, but at the most base level it is the ability to move--efficiently, safely, and at a reasonable cost--from one place to another. "Congestion" is more easily defined as a situation where demand or volume (e.g. vehicles or passengers) exceeds the capacity of the system to accommodate it. There is, however, some subjectivity in the perception of when congestion exists.

In Dutchess County the private automobile is the dominant means of travel. The suburban and rural land use pattern, which includes dispersed work, shopping, and residential locations, the size of the two counties, and the ready availability of private automobiles in most households (and for most individuals) make other alternatives (carpool, bus, rail, bicycle) less attractive for many trips. The reliance on automobiles is a major reason for the increase in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the region and corresponding increase in traffic volumes and congestion in some critical corridors.

In the past decade there have been major widening projects on some highways in Dutchess County. In the future the opportunities for large-scale widening may be less frequent due to financial, land use, and air quality limitations. Other effective methods of improving the system operation or controlling demand will need to be identified and implemented. Appropriate management activities could include improved traffic operations, increased ride-sharing activity, access management on major highway facilities, and expanded transit services. Use of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) such as variable message signs and electronic toll collection (e.g. E-ZPass) could also help alleviate congestion at key transportation facilities.

Safety

Improve safety and security on the transportation system (highways, transit, bicycles, etc.) with appropriate transportation improvement projects.

Safety in the transportation system is an on-going issue. Reducing the number of crashes and the accompanying property damage, injury, and death, is a concern in both highway and transit travel. There has been improvement in transportation safety in the past few years, but more can be done to identify and correct existing safety hazards, and to improve driver, passenger, bicyclist and pedestrian education programs.

Environmental Quality

Improve environmental quality consistent with established standards and balance environmental quality with mobility and economic activity.

Air Quality

Dutchess is part of the Mid-Hudson Nonattainment Area, which also includes Putnam and Northern Orange counties. The area is designated as moderate nonattainment for the ground pollutant ozone under the provisions of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA).

As part of a nonattainment area, the PDCTC must ensure that its long-range plans and transportation improvement programs (TIP) conform to federal transportation and clean air regulations. For moderate areas the requirements include reducing the emissions of ozone precursors (volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides), implementation of any transportation control measure (TCM) specified in the State Implementation Plan (SIP), development of strategies to reduce hydrocarbon emissions by 15 percent, and to attain of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Currently there are no transportation control measures required for the Mid-Hudson Nonattainment Area. New York State actions include adoption of California Car Standards and the sale of reformulated gasoline.

Additional activities or measures that could help Dutchess County meet the air quality standards include:

- improved transit service
- additional opportunities for ridesharing (car pools, van pools)
- traffic flow improvements
- employer-based flex time and/or transportation management programs
- increased use of non-motorized transportation (bicycling and walking)

No one type of activity will provide the emissions reductions required by CAAA. Success in improving air quality in the county will require a mix of actions and the cooperation of public and private interests.

Other Environmental Issues

Concern for other environmental resources is also a priority in Dutchess County. Existing state and county plans and policies recognize the importance of protecting sensitive natural and man made resources including: wetlands, flood plains, streams and rivers, aquifer recharge areas, steep slopes, agricultural soils, historic and archaeological sites, and areas of scenic importance. The development, expansion, or rehabilitation of new transportation facilities (including support facilities) should minimize impacts on these important resources.

In recent years concerns about the visual environment have increased in many communities. The Taconic State Parkway is a designated State Scenic Byway. A Scenic Byway Management Plan has been drafted and will be adopted in the near future. NYSDOT expects that the Taconic will be designated a National Scenic Byway.

Some towns have taken steps to inventory and designate scenic roads and important view corridors. In these areas preserving existing stone walls, roadside trees, and other important features is a major concern. Even along roads not formally designated as scenic, there is an interest in maintaining or establishing appropriate landscaping and design features to minimize the visual impact of widening, shoulder work, or other major

reconstruction projects. Balancing safety and operational concerns with scenic concerns is a continuing challenge. Defining what is scenic, the view from the road or the road itself, is also a major point of discussion.

Land Use Impacts

Establish stronger links between the transportation and land use planning and development processes. Improve communication and coordination among local, county, and state officials.

The links between land use and transportation are complex, and the need to strengthen them is a concern for federal, state, and local decision makers. In some areas concerns about the cost of maintaining infrastructure, clean air impacts, and future development trends have focused attention on land use planning to help manage the available transportation resources. In others, particularly villages and cities, there is interest in the concept of traffic calming, enhancing pedestrian facilities and safety as a way to improve quality of life.

In New York, there has traditionally been a strict separation between land use decisions made at the local level, and the construction and maintenance of major highways which are primarily the responsibilities of the county and state government. In many communities, the decisions about type, location, scale, and design of new development projects are made independently of decisions about maintaining, improving, or expanding the transportation system. Early and ongoing contact between local decision makers and state and county highway and transit agencies are needed to insure the proper coordination of land-use development to the transportation system.

Decisions about location and intensity of development, site design (including pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to new activity centers), permitting direct land access to major arterials, accommodating utility (e.g. water, wastewater, electric) expansion or replacement, evaluating environmental impacts, and capital investment should be discussed and coordinated at all levels to ensure that they are mutually reinforcing.

Economic Development

Implement transportation improvements that will support and enhance economic development opportunities in the region.

Until the early 1990s the Dutchess County economy was one of the strongest in the state. Employment cutbacks at several large private and public employers affected the local economy, and spurred efforts to expand the regional economic base. These efforts have been successful; new employment opportunities have come from both new and existing companies.

Transportation improvements and initiatives should complement county and regional efforts to attract new businesses, develop job opportunities, and expand the local

economy. The efforts should build on the existing transportation system and expand facilities or service levels where needed. The key is to increase the ease of access within, to, and from the county for businesses, workers, and shippers. Improvements to passenger and freight rail service including high-speed rail, air service (common carrier, cargo, general aviation), regional highway facilities, and bus transit services all have a role in strengthening the local economy.

Freight Movement

To identify and implement projects that would improve the movement of freight within the metropolitan area.

Most of the freight movement in this area takes place by truck on public highways and roads, although rail and barge facilities do have a limited role. Improvements to the interstate and arterial highway network will be important for freight carriers that operate in Dutchess County. There also may be interest by other commercial railroad companies in expanding rail freight service on the Hudson/Empire Line and the Beacon Line.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Activities

Integrate bicycle and pedestrian improvements with other elements of the transportation system.

Until recently, bicycle and pedestrian facilities were frequently considered desirable but non-essential components of the transportation system. Bicycling has grown in popularity both for transportation and recreation in recent years, and there is much more interest in accommodating bicycles within the system. There has also been increased interest in developing more extensive sidewalk networks in villages and among adjacent complementary uses. The requirements of TEA-21 and the Clear Air Act to develop alternate transportation methods and reduce reliance on single occupancy vehicles have also renewed interest in bicycling and walking as appropriate means of transportation, especially for shorter trips.

Enhancement Activities

Incorporate transportation enhancement projects into the planning process.

The current federal regulations require each state to program a portion of its federal surface transportation funds for enhancement activities that have a direct relationship to the transportation system. Examples of eligible activities include new pedestrian and bicycle facilities, rehabilitation of historic transportation facilities, preservation of abandoned railroad corridors, and protection of scenic resources. The Transportation Enhancement program should continue to be used to identify and implement projects that will improve a wide variety of transportation facilities and resources in this area.

Demographic and Travel Trends

To develop a transportation system that is responsive to anticipated changes in demographics in the region.

Changes in socio-economic factors such as the number of people, households, workers, and automobiles have implications for travel patterns in the region. Until very recently the figures for all these characteristics were steadily increasing with a resulting increase in traffic volumes on area roads. Some of the trends that bear watching include: changing commuter patterns, the impact of aging population, the establishment of group homes to serve physically and developmentally disabled people, and new requirements for welfare to work programs.

Commuter Patterns - There is evidence that more Dutchess County residents work in other counties, principally Westchester and New York City. This daily out-migration for work will impact transportation facilities in the larger Hudson Valley and New York metropolitan regions, as well as Dutchess County.

Aging Population - As life expectancy lengthens and the baby boomers age, there are implications for both highways and transit. Many older residents will retain their licenses and their desire for independence despite changing abilities and driving skills. Others may become more dependent on transit services and/or walking as their primary mode of travel.

Group Homes - New York continues its policy of moving many patients from state institutions into group homes scattered among the communities in the region. Most of the residents are dependent on others for transportation to sheltered workshops, jobs, and recreation activities. Some agencies and non-profit organizations provide transportation for their clients, others rely on existing public transit systems. There may be opportunities for greater coordination of services by the various organizations to increase efficiency and improve service.

Welfare to Work - Federal and state policies have put an increased emphasis on moving people from welfare into the work force. Transportation can be one of the major obstacles to finding and keeping a job for many people. Coordination among transit providers, social services agencies, and employers will be necessary to meet the goals of this initiative.

The population and its needs are not static; they change in response to the economy, age, and other social forces and the transportation system cannot remain fixed and unchanging either.

Intermodal Opportunities

To identify and implement projects that will expand the range of transportation options and facilitate movement among different modes.

ISTEA put the "intermodal" first, and there is continued interest at all levels in developing opportunities for greater transportation options for both people and goods. In Dutchess County efforts have been made to increase accessibility at the Metro-North stations, to expand the range of transit services (e.g. Commuter Train Connection), and to promote ridesharing (carpool and van pool) options for longer-distance commuters. Other programs include the initiation of new transit services between Dutchess and other Mid-Hudson counties (Orange, Putnam, and Westchester), one-fare tickets between local bus services and Metro-North Railroad, and transfers between the city and county bus systems.

Additional activities could include better coordination of fares and schedules among transit systems in the region, promotion of TransitChek use among area employers, ongoing marketing of transportation alternatives, and expansion of park and ride locations. The establishment of new park and ride lots is often complicated by issues of operating and maintenance responsibilities, and concerns about safety and security. These types of initiatives will help the county and the region to meet transportation and air quality goals.

New York State Survey

In March 2000 the New York State metropolitan planning organizations commissioned Zogby International to conduct a telephone survey to determine residents' attitudes about transportation. The resulting report, Statewide Attitudinal and Preference Survey, provides information about how New Yorkers feel about both the existing transportation system and the need for improvements. The survey sample consisted of about 2,400 calls that were divided into eight regional samples. The regions included North Country, Western New York, Southern Tier, Central New York, Albany/Upper Hudson, Long Island, New York City, and the Lower Hudson Valley (which included Dutchess County). The survey included a range of questions about the quality of various system elements (e.g. highways, transit, bridges), the importance of various transportation planning goals, support for funding system improvements, and information about how, where, and when people travel. The survey results indicate that the PDCTC transportation goals described here are consistent with the attitudes and preferences of residents in our region.

Transportation Planning Goals

The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of seven different transportation planning goals as very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, or not important. Statewide and in every region the goal statement "[E]mphasis on continued maintenance of the existing highway and public transit systems" received the highest number of positive (very important/somewhat important) responses. In the Lower Hudson region the combined positives were 98 percent.

The following list ranks the seven goal statements in order for the Lower Hudson Region and shows the corresponding statewide rank.

Rank	Percent Positive	Goal Statement	Statewide Rank
1	98.0	Emphasis on continued maintenance of the existing highway and public transit systems.	1
2	94.0	To reduce congestion through measures that better utilize the existing highway system (e.g. E-ZPass, park and ride, and carpools).	3
3	86.3	More projects to improve the quality of life (e.g. more bicycle trails, sidewalks, access to outdoor Recreation, and noise reduction).	2
4	85.1	Expanding public transit service, such as bus and rail.	4
5	84.0	Transportation projects that promote economic development and job creation.	5
6	82.3	To reduce traffic congestion by adding lanes or building new roads.	6
7	71.1	Projects that encourage development in existing built up areas already served by the transportation system.	7

Residents of the Lower Hudson Valley are most interested in infrastructure maintenance, and improving the efficiency of existing system. Other areas of interest are expanding transportation options that improve quality of life, access and economic development.

Transportation Improvements

Those responding to the survey were asked to rate the desirability of eight different types of improvements. There was greater variability in the responses among the different regions of the state. Statewide (and in four of the eight regions) the provision of more park and ride locations received the highest combined positive (very desirable, somewhat desirable) ratings. In the Lower Hudson Valley the convergence of more types of service (bus, rail, others) at hubs or terminals was ranked first, and park and ride locations were second.

Rank	Percent Positive	Possible Transportation Improvement	Statewide Rank
1	88.4	More kinds of service (bus, rail, others) converge at hubs or terminals	2
2	87.0	More park and ride locations	1
3	83.6	Additional by-pass routes to carry traffic around small towns	3
4	79.4	Focus new economic growth toward existing built up areas already served by the transportation system	4
5	75.2	More bicycle trails	5
6	75.0	More sidewalks	8
7	72.8	Special lanes at rush hour for vehicles carrying at least two people	6
8	69.7	Designation of more scenic and tourism routes	7

Again, there is support for expanding the range of transportation options available for residents in the region, and for projects that contribute to a positive quality of life. It is interesting to note that among the planning goals encouraging development in built up areas had the lowest level of support (71 percent), while among the potential transportation improvements it ranks in the middle.

Transportation Spending

The Zogby survey also included various questions about funding transportation improvements in the state. Statewide, about three-quarters of the respondents said that transportation spending was a “very high” or “high” priority compared to other public needs. The responses were similar in the Lower Hudson Valley region. There was also support for local funding of roads, bridges, local bus systems, commuter rail, light rail/subway, and local airports with the combined positives (strongly support and somewhat support) between 65 and 82 percent. There was, however, no clear support to raise additional money from either local or statewide sources for transportation.

Summary

The issues and goals discussed in this element reflect the same concerns highlighted by the transportation planning factors (page 2). None of the issues can be considered in isolation. There are some potential conflicts and contradictions that need to be addressed as the recommendations of Connections 2025 are implemented. The overriding goal is the evolution of a transportation network that serves the diverse needs of the area.